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## CONTEMPORARY SYNAGOGUE MUSIC IN AMERICA

HERBERT FROMM

The history of Hebrew sacred music goes back to the time of King David, some 3000 years ago. Biblical sources tell us of a splendid musical pageant performed by a multitude of singers and instrumentalists, 'and we need only turn to the one hundred and fiftieth Psalm to find within a few lines of poetry a flash of those early rites transmitted through the haze of centuries.

The public reading of the Bible, as introduced by Ezra after the Babylonian captivity in the 5th century B.C., was performed as a cantillation, a chanting of the text. This cantillation of the Bible has been preserved throughout the ages and its ancient Oriental origin can still be recognized.

After the destruction of the second Temple in the year 70 A.D. the remnants of the Jewish people were scattered all over the Roman Empire. The musical tradition was preserved from mouth to mouth but the rabbis forbade all instrumental music for worship as a sign of mourning for the loss of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Hebrew music was reduced to unaccompanied unison singing.

With the development of worship as a daily ritual there arose the need for a man who would stand before the congregation, recite the prayers and chant the Bible. This office, in contrast to the Temple in Jerusalem where only the priests and Levites took an active part in the Service, was occupied by a layman chosen by the congregation and called *Sheliah Tzibbur*, the messenger of the congregation. As music and prayers grew more complex the need for a professional precentor was felt and thus, in the early middle ages, the office of the Hazzan, or Cantor, came into being.

The music so far dealt with was strictly melodic and without any harmonic accompaniment. The first known attempt to introduce harmony into the music of the Synagogue was made in Italy by Salomone Rossi in the beginning of the 17th century. Rossi, court musician in Mantua and a composer of secular fame, aimed at a reform of Jewish liturgical music by introducing harmony and counterpoint, "the rules of musical art", as he called them. Although protected by the famous and versatile Rabbi Leone de Modena who wrote a preface to Rossi's work (**1622**) the reform did not spread.

Rossi's approach was completely European and certainly a great exception in his time. Most Jews continuing in the belief that their stay in exile was only temporary and that they would finally return to Zion instinctively preserved the Oriental elements in their music

although yielding here and there to influences of the Western world. The French Revolution and the Emancipation, however, changed the outlook among less orthodox Jews and led to radical innovations in worship.

The Reform movement starting in the first half of the nineteenth century set itself apart from the Orthodox Synagogue with the idea of remodeling Judaism according to modern needs. As far as music was concerned, an enrichment of means was the consequence; organ and mixed choir were introduced. While the unaccompanied cantorial solos still preserved the ancient modes with their special flavor and leaning toward florid improvisation, the music for choir and organ was pressed into the mold of Western tradition. The free flow of the Hebrew language was hindered by 19th century conventions; musical forms built on regular periods of even numbered measures proved to be a rigid frame for the irregular meters of Hebrew texts.

Two monumental works are the outstanding examples of this development. *Shir Zion* (Song of Zion) by Salomon Sulzer and *Todah V'zimrah* (Praise and Song) by Louis Lewandowski. Both men were deeply influenced by the German music of the 19th century. Their music is clean, concise, dignified, but rarely characteristic.

In the beginning of its harmonic ventures Synagogue music walked on stilts. It was so with Rossi in the 17th century, with Sulzer, Lewandowski and a host of other composers in the 19th century. In our own time new efforts have been made to arrive at a more idiomatic liturgical style and we have been witnessing a profound renewal of Synagogue music in America roughly beginning around the year 1930.

The proposition that Jewish music, for the sake of purity, should offer nothing but unharmonized chants is the dream of theorists. If we want to face up to musical realities we must recognize the effects of a long Jewish history within the Western world. The interplay between the Jewish heritage and the achievements of Western music is what interests the contemporary Jewish composer. A style is emerging which blends ancient materials with the devices of modern music or else is freely creative by taking a general Jewish consciousness as point of departure.

The contemporary trend may be summarized in this fashion:

1. Return to the proper modes (certain motifs within a given scale) of the Ashkenazic tradition of Central and Eastern Europe.

2. Inclusion of material from the Sephardic, that is, Spanish, Italian and Southern French, heritage.
3. Utilization of the chants of Oriental communities made available through the volumes of A. Z. Idelsohn.
4. Exploration of harmonic and contrapuntal devices suitable for melodic material originally conceived without accompaniment.
5. Free invention of melodies in the spirit of authentic sources.
6. Greater care in the understanding of Hebrew inflection and syntax.
7. Creation of professional music departments in the synagogues capable of meeting the demands of this new music.

The process of purification of synagogue music owes a debt to Lazare Saminsky. His compositions bear the stamp of honest beginnings: Simplicity, even starkness of texture, brevity of form and careful regard for liturgical usefulness. Nothing green seems to grow in Saminsky's music but we honor in it a sincere striving toward a clearly envisioned ideal of sacred expression. The following example is the opening of Saminsky's 92nd Psalm. See example No. 1

Joseph Achron, in his Friday Eve Service, excels by melodic invention of definitely Jewish flavor. His harmony, however, does not enhance the freshness of his melodic ideas. There is a groping for the right chords but seldom a truly convincing solution. With all that, Achron's Service is the remarkable creation of an intense and searching mind.

Jacob Weinberg, influenced by the theories of Joseph Yasser, offered in his Friday Eve Service his best contribution. The work, loosely based on the pentatonic scale, is richly elaborated in texture as well as in the expansiveness of form. His Sabbath Morning Service which followed much later was conceived on an even larger scale but lacks the musical communication of the earlier work.

A W. Binder became a major influence on the rejuvenation of Synagogue music in America. It was he who propagated in musical works as well as in his teaching the return to the best sources of Jewish tradition. His works are imbued with motifs from both prayer modes and biblical cantillation, with an occasional leaning on Israeli folk music. His harmony, sometimes backward, sometimes experimental, does not always reach a sympathetic relationship with his melodic material.

The work of Heinrich Schalit occupies a special place. His music, whether based on tradition or freely invented, bears invariably the stamp of a personal style. He probably was the first composer of

consequence to use some of the Oriental chants from Idelsohn's compilation with exemplary results. The musical illustration taken from Schalit's Friday Evening Liturgy represents the opening of **L'cha Dodi** (Welcoming of the Sabbath Bride). It is based on Idelsohn's notation of an Oriental-Sephardic chant and shows the composer's original mind in the fresh diatonic harmony and rhythmic finesse resulting from the canonic approach to a model which spans no more than the interval of a diminished fifth. See example No. 2

We have two Sabbath Eve Services by Frederick Jacobi, the first, an a capella work, the second, with organ accompaniment. The earlier work offers much musical interest although the effort to find a Jewish idiom sometimes deteriorates into artificial devices, such as syncopations of more Scottish than Jewish provenance, cold, un-felt coloraturas, etc. The later work written shortly before the composer's death aims at a forced homophonic simplicity. Its harmonic staleness and constant repetition of phrases indicate a fatigue of the composer's creative powers. His Hebrew anthem **Teyfen l'hakshiv** (Turn to listen) after a poem by Saadia Gaon (882-942) may well be his best work for the Synagogue. There is an uncompromising starkness, economy of means, a compelling accord between melody and harmonic idiom and an altogether admirable concentration of the composer's musical resources.

Lazar Weiner, the undisputed master of the secular Yiddish art song, is going different ways in his liturgical works which, in a larger context, may be seen as a continuation of what Joseph Achron had begun. Weiner's melody has the authentic ring of Jewish declamation and he is continuously searching for musical textures best fitted for his material. In his later works he has arrived at a freely dissonant and often elaborate harmonic scheme.

Gershon Ephros, pupil of Idelsohn, professional cantor and compiler of the indispensable Cantorial Anthology in five volumes, is a composer who has so far published two large scale works for the Synagogue, **S'lichot** (Midnight Penitential Service) and **L'yon Hashabbat**, a Sabbath Morning Service for use in the conservative Synagogue. A Friday Evening Service, at the time of this writing, is awaiting publication. Similar to the method of Ernest Bloch whole sections of the liturgy are bound together in large movements whose individual pieces are connected by interludes. These interludes give the impression of afterthoughts and do not always come off successfully. Ephros is one of the best representatives of those composers who lovingly nurture **Nussach hatefillah**, the traditional prayer

modes. His work suffers from an undeviating density of polyphonic writing.

Isadore Freed added a special note to the music of the Synagogue, a natural grace and elegance which perhaps had not been heard since the time of Salomone Rossi. Having studied in France, Freed applied a subtle overlay of French harmony to Jewish material although he remained deeply concerned with traditional modes as shown in his valuable treatise on the subject.

Max Helfman has his roots in the Polish-Russian tradition with its unrestrained emotional appeal and its flair for theatrical effects. His work **Aron Hakodesh** (The Holy Ark) accompanying the ceremony of the scriptural reading exemplifies these traits most strikingly.

Hugo Chaim Adler was a cantor of distinctly creative gifts. His hallmark is a moderately contemporary polyphony set to the melodic material of the German, more specifically, the Southern German tradition.

Julius Chajes, best known for his secular Jewish music, has not given much to the Synagogue but his one slim volume has the distinction of a clearly defined style. It is a stubborn diatonicism delivered with the conviction of a firmly rooted musical philosophy.

Herman Berlinski, in his Sabbath Eve Service **Auodat Shabbat**, appears wholeheartedly committed to the task of shaping a specifically Jewish melos. It is an ambitious work carried out with excellent workmanship but a predilection for heavy structures often obscures the eloquence of melodic statements.

Reuven Kosakoff's **Lichvod Shabbat** shows the composer in an emphatic attempt to reconcile old and new ways which leads to occasional incongruities. But there are successful solutions such as the antiphonal 98th Psalm, an imaginative chaconne for **Hashkienu** and variations on a good **Adon Olam** tune.

Having dealt so far with works of practical dimensions a few words must be said about the Sabbath Morning Services by Ernest Bloch and Darius Milhaud. Bloch's Service written for chorus, baritone cantor and large orchestra oversteps by far the limits set by the ordinary demands of the liturgy which is not a fault in the case of so precious a gift. Bloch approaches the text in the fervent and personal way of a man deeply stirred by his Jewish experience and the symbolism of an ancient faith. It is the "harsh and haughty accents of the Hebrew tongue" which we hear in Bloch's music.

Darius Milhaud's "**Service Sacre**" is not of the same stature as Bloch's work although more liturgical in its general attitude. Milhaud

wins new honors for the melodic lilt of the Southern French tradition which he dyes in the colors of his often cliché-ridden polytonal harmony. A perfectly delightful number is to be found in the appendix which contains pieces for the Sabbath Eve Service. It is *L'Sha Dodi* which in spite of its easy-going and even mechanical form appears utterly disarming by its feminine grace.

As a general observation, let me say here that outsiders, that is, composers who are not intimately connected with the Synagogue and whose relationship with liturgical music results from no more than an occasional commission rarely find the right tone and proportion.

This is not saying anything against the possibility of their producing valuable music, it only points up the fact that the precarious balance between beauty and usefulness required by the liturgy can, as a rule, not be achieved by induced concentration on the subject. I know very well that readers with a psychological vocabulary will detect in this statement "guild feelings" on my part but I think that a perusal of the available literature will prove my point.

Of the composers discussed so far, nine are not alive anymore: Achron, Hugo Adler, Binder, Bloch, Freed, Helfman, Jacobi, Saminsky and Weinberg. The others are either middle aged or older men. Few composers of the younger generation have shown a more than passing interest in the music of the Synagogue. It is rare in our day that a young musician is satisfied with the anonymity he is sure to find in the dimly lit places of the nation's musical life. But I will name three who have already distinguished themselves in the field.

Samuel Adler, son of the cantor-composer mentioned above, has contributed several complete Services as well as a number of anthems and responses. His *Shir Chadash* (A New Song) for cantor, three part choir and organ, and *Shiru Ladonai* (Sing unto the Lord) for solo voice and organ, were mainly created in answer to practical needs but offer in some instances excellent examples of *Gebrauchsmusik* on a high level. I am particularly referring to *L'cha Dodi*, *Veshamru* III and *Yismechu I* in *Shir Chadash*, and *L'cha Dodi* and *Barechu* (Call to Worship) in the solo Service. Adler's most serious effort is a Sabbath Service *Be-Shaarey Tefila* (Within the Gates of Prayer), for cantor, mixed choir and organ. The style is freely polyphonic in modal tonalities and characterized by sudden shifts of the tonal center. The following example from the *Kedusha* (Sanctification) for the Sabbath Morning Service may serve as a good sample of the composer's skill and imagination. See example No. 3



Charles Davidson, cantor in a conservative synagogue, must be counted among those cantors who have achieved a thorough professionalism as composer. He is a versatile musician writing dissonant harmony (“The Earth is the Lord’s”), traditional music of East European extraction, brightened by cautiously enriched harmony (“Hashkivenu”), jazz and simple accompaniments to folk tunes (“Saenu”).

I am not convinced when he mixes styles in one and the same work, as in “The Earth is the Lord’s”, where we get a passage like this. (See example No. 4)

this. See example No. 4

as against a conventional ending of this kind: See example No. 5

A choral number from Davidson’s “Dialogue with Destiny”, called “Vayaar V’hine Hasneh” strikes me, musically, as a fully realized composition, even if the music is not in agreement with the miraculous scene of the burning bush.

Here, a simple, fairly diatonic vocal line is set against a piano accompaniment of greatly refined rhythm; the rhythmic element appears as the contemporary feature of an otherwise traditional composition. Since Davidson’s sensitivity to rhythmical events seems more highly developed than his ear for the immovable rightness of dissonant harmony, a satisfying work emerges.

Yehudi Wyner has not yet written in quantity for the Synagogue but his two works, A Friday Evening Service and a Torah Service for Sabbath Morning, are original and challenging enough to warrant some detailed remarks. Of the two works, the shorter Torah Service, scored for cantor, mixed choir, two trumpets, one horn, one trombone and string bass, is more unified stylistically although its predominant chromatic complexity may be less idiomatic for the Synagogue. The earlier work requiring cantor, mixed choir and organ is preceded by a foreword in which the composer states some of his aims. “I tried to create an expression of directness and intimacy, relevant to the modest, undramatic conduct of worship in the traditional synagogue”, and further “traditional fragments have been used in a very free way, but the traditionalism of the Service stems more from absorbed experience than applied method”.

The first statement referring to the intimacy of the Service is borne out by the work but it is also apologetic in the sense that Wyner is aware of his limitations. At moments when the text demands drama such as in *Hashkivenu* (“remove from us every **enemy**, pestilence, sword, famine and sorrow”), the music offers no more than primitive shouts in octaves. Another instance: The tumultu-

ous verses of Psalm 96 (“let the sea roar and the fulness thereof, let the fields exult and all that is therein; then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy”) are rendered in a stationary, soft repetition of a short phrase. This might be interpreted as an expression of awe but it is hardly a musical equivalent of the unrestrained fervor of the text.

The remark about the use of tradition gives the key to Wyner’s approach. The Service is indeed a transformation of traditional motifs from strict adherence to creative remodeling. The most conspicuous motif occurring again and again is the *Tipcha* motif, one of the 28 *taamey han’ginot* (neumes) used for the chanting of the scriptures. See example No. 5A

Idelsohn’s collection of the chants of Oriental Jewish communities is used in *Oleynu* and in the Benediction. The problem of an organ accompaniment for *Oleynu* is solved delicately by one sustained chord which represents in a vertical column the notes of the melody. The reason why, after this, the *Vaanachnu* section is kept in an unaccompanied unison does not become clear.

The short organ pieces seem to me the most problematical part of the Service. The composer is fully conscious of it when he says in the preface: “The organ pieces are clearly different from the rest of the music. They should be registered and paced to give the illusion of being in a world apart.” This certainly is true, the organ pieces are not integrated and do stand by themselves, locked out, strange and shivering. I am puzzled why this should be so and my vague impression is that Wyner, for some reason or other, does not like the organ for Jewish worship and allows this feeling to come to the surface. Significantly, this problem does not arise in the Torah Service which is not accompanied by organ but by five instruments.

The separateness of the organ, however, is not observed with absolute strictness. There are quite a few places where the world or organ music intrudes into the vocal writing, not as subservient accompaniment but in independent preludes and interludes. Then we get a clash of styles as in this example where a finely balanced modal unison passage is followed by an organ interlude which is incomprehensible in this context. See example No. 6

The problem of organ in juxtaposition with the choir is overcome with conspicuous success in L’cha Dodi where a complete integration is achieved. A piece of this kind could serve as a model for the composer’s work in the future.

In spite of all these exceptions I wish to emphasize that Wyner’s work is an important contribution, not only by virtue of its genuine

and unmistakable Jewish flavor but also by the contemporary, urbane treatment given to the material by a cultivated and unconventional musician. Once all elements of the composer's style have been welded into a complete union the music of the Synagogue may expect to be enriched by fresh and enduring works.

A word must be said about the recent rash of jazz and rock services. These attempts, designed to bring young people in **contact** with synagogue music, are still curiosities but will probably be in demand for some time to come.

The simplistic level of these services cannot satisfy an ear steeped in the music of Bach or Bloch. I, by upbringing and inclination, must confess that I cannot find a personal relationship to jazz and rock. The fault may lie on my side but of one thing I am sure: If the young people want to "do their own thing" they should do it all the way and set to work writing new prayer texts. They must not fall back on the words of the traditional prayer book which can not be forced into the same yoke with the kind of music the young generation prefers. If they succeed in matching words and music something might result that can at least claim stylistic unity, whatever its intrinsic value may be.

The printed statement of the composer of a rock service to the effect that church music, through the influence of jazz and rock, is now entering its greatest period, is utter nonsense, no matter from what angle you look at it.

In conclusion I would like to touch upon an uncomfortable question brought about by the title of this article which uses the term "contemporary". Naturally, in a literal sense, all music written by contemporary composers is contemporary music. Coming to the point I want to make we should phrase the question this way: How contemporary, meaning here, how advanced, how modern, can Synagogue music, or, for that matter, Church music be?

The works of the younger composers mentioned above as well as my own contributions are surely progressive in comparison to what has gone before. Although often harshly dissonant, they are still within the bounds of tonality, and not committed to the school of atonal writing.

I do not believe that it is a matter of practical considerations which detains composers from writing atonal music for the Synagogue. There seems to be a natural, probably even a historical, instinct at work which recognizes that only a style that has already gained general acceptance will be possible in a house of worship.

Much of the progressive, though tonal, music written today for

the Synagogue must still wait its turn. The mills grind slowly and it cannot be foretold if and when atonal music will be admitted. Observers with a philosophical turn of mind might even see a connection between the “God is dead” and “Tonality is dead” slogans. Be that as it may, the fact is that even a neo-classical work like Stravinsky’s Mass, written nearly 20 years ago, has not yet taken root in the Catholic Church where it belongs, and to this day has remained a concert work. Schoenberg’s atonal Psalm 130, dating from the year 1950, was written in Hebrew and meant for the Synagogue. It may be found in an Anthology of Jewish Music but, to my knowledge, has not yet had a hearing within the walls of a sanctuary.

Thus, the term “contemporary”, as used for this essay, means “progressive” in the relative and necessary conservative, sense of Church history, and not what currently goes as the last or even the second last cry.

## Example 1

*Sicero maestoso*

Lazare Saminsky

The musical score for Example 1 is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It is marked *Sicero maestoso*. The score is divided into three systems, each featuring a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Hebrew. The first system includes the words "Tov ie ho- dot la- do - nai, ul' zn- ner le-". The second system includes "shim- cha - ei - yon, le-he- gid ba- bo her, ba- bo- her chas-". The third system includes "de-cha - ve- e- mu- na- te- cha ba- le - lot." The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in both hands, often with triplets and slurs.

## Example 2

Heinrich Schalit

Example 2 musical score for Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Tenor/Bass (T/B). The score is in G major (one flat) and common time (C). The tempo is marked *f* (forte). The lyrics are:

S: *f* L' cha do di li kra' 'a a p' ney sha bot n'

A: *f* L' cha do di li kra' ka la' p' ney sha bot

T/B: *f* L' cha do di li kra' ka la' p' ney sha bot

Second system lyrics:

S: ka b' lah, n' ka b' lah.

A: n' ka b' lah, n' ka b' lah.

T/B: n' ka b' lah, n' ka b' lah.

## Example 3

Samuel Adler

Example 3 musical score for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Organ. The score is in G major (one flat) and common time (C). The tempo is marked *ff* (fortissimo) and the metronome is set to 116. The lyrics are:

S: *ff* Yim loth A do na i' o lam, e lo

A: *ff* Yim loth A do na i' o lam,

T: *ff* Yim loth A do na i' o lam,

B: *ff* Yim loth A do na i' o lam, e lo ha -

Organ: *ff*

ha - vich tsi- yon, 1<sup>o</sup> - dor va- dor, halle- - yah, etc  
 e-lo- ha-vich tsi- yon, 1<sup>o</sup> - dor va- dor halle- lu- yah etc  
 vich tsi- yon, ————— 1<sup>o</sup> - dor va- dor halle- lu- yah etc

Example 4

Charles Davidson

etc

Example 5

Charles Davidson

Example 5a

## Example 6

Wyner

Handwritten musical score for Example 6, titled "Wyner". The score is written on a grand staff with four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices, Organ, and Pedal.

The tempo is marked  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ . The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Hoi v. ha dar l'far nav, — oz v' tif- e-ret b' mik da-sho etc".

The organ part includes the word "etc" at the end of the second measure. The pedal part includes the word "etc" at the end of the second measure.



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**GERSHON SIROTA:  
AN APPRECIATION\***

ISSACHAR FATER

In the history of music one finds, from time to time, personalities who capture the imagination, affection and respect of the entire world with their extraordinary artistic attainments. Like meteors these personalities light up the scene around them with a blazing, dazzling light. This is especially true of interpreters of music: singers, instrumentalists and conductors, who, during their life-time become living legends. Among this category of extraordinary talents were such musical figures as Paganini (1782-1840), probably the greatest violin virtuoso of all time; Battistini (1857-1928) the greatest operatic dramatic-baritone of his time; the world renown tenor, Enrico Caruso (1882-1947). These and others like them were, during their life-time, and remain to this day unsolved riddles in the cultural history of man.

Among hazzanim the only man who earned a similar niche for himself was Gershon Sirota (1887(?) - 1943). He was blessed with a majestic dramatic tenor voice, a naturally elegant and pliable coloratura that produced trills, melismas and other vocal ornamentation with ease and grace. These techniques which require years of frustrating labor and practice of others were only a part of Sirota's God-given talent. He was also blessed with an innate musicianship which helped him to grasp easily the basic crafts of the musician; and above all the wit and intelligence which permitted him to use these gifts wisely and for their greatest effect. All of these qualities made Gershon Sirota the hazzan of his generation and perhaps of all time. One or two of these qualities would be enough to produce a fine singer, but a man who possessed them all in such richness was bound to be an unusual talent.

There were many world famous hazzanim who reached the realm of greatness via one or another special talent. Some achieved

This biographical sketch is one of many in a new book by Issachar Fater, "*Yiddishe Muzik in Poilen Tz'vish'n Beide Velt Milchomes, 1918-1939*", published last month in Israel with the assistance of the Cantors Assembly.

It is a comprehensive record of the hazzanic, folk, theater, classical and popular music of the Jews of the period between the two World Wars and will contain 24 detailed monographs on the outstanding musicians of that era, 400 short biographical sketches of lesser-known musicians, over 100 pictures and documents and an entire section of musical examples and illustrations.

\* The translation from the Yiddish is by Samuel Rosenbaum.



fame with the sweetness of the voice. Their chief talent lay in the hypnotic magic with which the voice was able to stir the soul of the listener. Often, the effect was greater on the soul than on the ear. Their singing exuded a sense of peace and faith which evoked a mood of prayerfulness and repentance in the worshipper.

There were other hazzanic giants who capitalized on a poor voice and developed a pleading, tearful style of prayer chant whose overriding impact was that of a child pleading before his father. Tearfully, they implored the Almighty to open the gates of heaven and accept their prayers in behalf of the congregation. Their style was quiet and humble, prostrating themselves in the manner of ***Hinnení He-ani Mimaas***, "Behold, I am poor in deeds."

There were still others who owed their success to the power of their voices. Of fiery temperament these men produced a passionate outpouring of religious ecstasy in the manner of ***B'kol shofar gadol***, "the sound of the Great Shofar." This was usually coupled with the typically Yiddish sigh of protest and pain, the ***krechts***, which never failed to evoke tears from the worshippers. These hazzanic virtuosi were renowned and acclaimed by Jews the world over. Yossele Rosenblatt (1880-1933), Mordecai Hershman (1886-1943) and the recently deceased Moshe Koussevitsky (1899-1965) were of this type; but none of these could compare with Gershon Sirota. While he was yet alive he had already been crowned with such titles as "King of the Hazzanim," "The Jewish Caruso" and his name was spoken with the greatest reverence and affection by the great Jewish masses and by many non-Jews, as well. He was the epitome of the hazzan-virtuoso in the finest sense of the word.

His voice, from the lowest register through the upper tenor range was uniformly brilliant. There was no wobble nor were there any weak spots in any particular section of his magnificent 20 tone range. The voice was homogenous throughout. The lower tones, as the upper tones, were always brilliant and powerful, and when he maneuvered in the upper reaches of his range, the pitch and intonation were secure and always on target. At times, when Sirota would move to the upper range, the listeners were certain that the pinnacle had been reached. Then he would take everyone by surprise and move from that seeming high-point to new heights, always securely, never uncomfortable and never causing discomfort or doubt in the listener.

This was Sirota in improvisation. The high-C held no peril for him. He would reach it and hold it for as long as it suited his effect. Generally, he would move in the range of the high-A or B, leaving

himself plenty of room to astound the congregation with a climax of a C or a D. Such flashing brilliance never failed to draw tears of approval and wonder from those who heard him.

But Sirota did not content himself only with his unusual range and power. Bare, indeed, is the voice that has both strength and the agility and grace to produce an evenly articulated melismatic coloratura. But Sirota came by this technique naturally. He moved up and down his great span of voice effortlessly. Now he was in the stratosphere, flying like an eagle, his voice bristling with thunder and lightning-bolts and then, in a flash, he was down in the nether regions, dark, gloomy, sighing and pleading. His tones were always warm, caressing and sensual. He could be, in turn, soft and placating, then stern and demanding, and in an instant, uplifting and inspiring. He seemed to have a bottomless well of melody which evoked yearning and dreams. Then there were chimes of brilliant clusters of tones that hypnotized one with a sense of dedication-to-the-death to the cause of God and Israel.

Sirota's voice and coloratura were in their own way a reflection of the fate of the Jewish people and in the course of his improvisations it would happen that tones would remain suspended in mid-air seemingly determined to remain vibrating until by sheer will-power they would break through the clouds which separate man from his Creator. It was at such times that Sirota would refuse to succumb to the mortal failings of breath and energy. Stubbornly, the tones hung there until Sirota was satisfied that he had indeed been victorious and that his prayers had reached their intended destination.

I remember once when my father, of blessed memory, and I paid a visit to the home of Eizenstadt, the choir director. After some time he beckoned us to accompany him to Sirota's synagogue. We entered through a back door. There, high above us, on the pulpit was Sirota absorbed in vocalizing. He was unaware of our presence and allowed the full, range of his voice to flow. Little by little he warmed up to his practice. The voice was now the glorious instrument which we knew so well. For a moment it seemed that the entire synagogue had been ensnared in a single clap of thunder. Then, changing again, Sirota's tones evoked memories of artillery fire. The windows rattled in their casements, the doors moved to and fro as the waves of Sirota's voice impinged on them and it seemed to us that the entire building shuddered. As suddenly as it had erupted, the storm subsided. In its place came a stream of soft soul-searching pathos,

delicate falsetto tremolos and gossamer-spun piano tones strung out one after another like pearls.

In addition to the two great gifts with which nature had blessed him, voice and coloratura, Sirota was steeped in the traditional *nushaot hatefillah*, prayer modes. He always kept in mind that he was more than a singer, he was a *sheliah tzibbur*, the emissary of the congregation before the Almighty, a *baal tefillah*, a master of prayer. He was always completely aware of the inner meaning of the texts of the liturgy. His chants were in the form of a dialogue between himself and God. He would begin a recitative softly, the way one begins to tell a story, as though he hoped he could make his point with the Almighty gently without undue histrionics. But, as he proceeded, his pleas became more urgent, more demanding. As the prayer moved along to its climax, Sirota, sensing that perhaps it had not been accepted by the Almighty, began to pour truly heroic efforts into the breach. And when one heard him at such moments of climactic appeal one could understand the full meaning of the Bratslaver Rebbe when he said, "Song breaks down walls."

In his volume, "*Toldot HaNeginah veheHazzanut BeYisrael*", the "History of Music and Hazzanut in Israel" Dr. Hayim Harris, reports that the famous composer-conductor Leo Low, who was Sirota's choir-director for twelve years in Warsaw, recalled that one year, on Rosh Hashanah, Sirota's treatment of *Ata Nigleta* evoked such visions of Sinai aflame that the congregation was literally enveloped in such a fear as might well have enveloped those who actually had stood at the foot of the mountain to receive the Torah. Dr. Harris reports further that the late Hazzan Yehoshua Weisser told him that when he looked at Sirota after he had finished the *Ata Nigleta* he was frightened at his appearance. He could hardly recognize the man. He had become a roaring lion. He approached the chanting of two other well-known compositions in a similar state of feverish inspiration, *Adonai, Adonai* by A. M. Bernstein and *R'tzeh* by Sclossberg.

We come now to still another aspect of Sirota's talent, his professionalism and restraint when he sang with a choir. One might think Sirota's uniquely gifted personality and independant spirit might have led him to be demanding and arbitrary, but, to his credit it must be recorded that he was at all times a cooperative soloist, accepting direction without a show of temperament. When he appeared with choir it was always in the role of a participant, never as a virtoso soloist. Eizenstadt confided in me that in his opinion Sirota was the most cooperative and the most pliant hazzan

of all with whom he had worked in Warsaw. He was always receptive to the needs of the choir, took direction and suggestions without complaint.

Details of Sirota's life are hard to come by. According to Elijah Zaludkovsky's *Hazzanim Lexicon*, Sirota "commenced his hazzanic career in one of the better synagogues in Odessa. He moved from there to Vilna where he served as the hazzan of that city's *Shtot-Shul* for eight years. The synagogue in which he served was a traditional one in its ritual practices although its adherents were sympathetic to the mood of enlightenment which at that time had introduced a liberalizing effect on Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Sirota, with the help of Leo Low, helped to raise the musical standards of the congregation to a new, high level of musical professionalism and taste without departing from the traditional melos of synagogue tradition. One of the great moments of Sirota's tenure in Vilna was the grand concert of Jewish music which he gave, together with a massive choir, in the year 1902. Another, was the great part which he played in the reception given to Theodore Herzl by the Jewish community of Vilna on the occasion of his visit in 1903.

Sirota's popularity grew daily. His success did not swerve him from his determination to continue to study, to grow and to improve. Finally, in 1908, he was invited to come to Warsaw where he became the prestigious *Oberkantor* of the *Deitcher Synagogue* on Tlamacke Street. From there his fame spread all over the world.

In 1912, Sirota, together with Leo Low, came to America for a series of concerts. Leo Low had come with Sirota to Warsaw to take the post of Choir Director and was by that time Sirota's closest friend and associate. The concerts were highly successful and encouraged them both. The Jews of New York idolized Sirota. The first concert in that city took place in Carnegie Hall on February 14th. The following day the "WAHRHEIT" reported:

"Carnegie Hall was packed from top to bottom. The crowds which remained outside were even greater; men and women, young and old who tried without success to get in to hear the concert by this great tenor and the choir under the direction of Herr Low. New York has never witnessed such a scene. The police had their hands full in keeping order on the street. Among the gentile members of the audience were such personalities as Baron Shlimenbach, the Russian Consul-General, State Senator Tom Sullivan, the Rev. Dr. Parkhurst and Herman Rider of the "CITY-NEWS." Also present

has written Three Sacred Songs for solo, with cello and piano, and is working on wedding music for Hazzan Samuel Rosenbaum in Rochester. Additional performances of “Sabbath for Today,” besides the Temple on the Heights in Cleveland and Temple Sharey Tefilo in East Orange, N.J., have been given at the University of Judaism and Temple Sinai in Los Angeles, Ahavas Achim in Atlanta, Ga., Temple Beth El in Rochester, N.Y., and the Hebrew College in Cincinnati.

Written originally for the Reform liturgy, “Sabbath for Today” is scored for cantor, mixed choir, organ, and an instrumental ensemble consisting of piano, percussion instruments, guitar, bass, and Moog Synthesizer. The readings were selected by Rabbi Charles Annes, who commissioned the work for his congregation, Temple Sharey Tefilo, East Orange, N.J., where the service was originally premiered.

A close scrutiny of the work reveals that the music is basically simple in its melodic and rhythmic structure, and its harmonic patterns are easy to follow. The melodies are sung in unison or two-part harmony, with occasional three-part harmony, and the total effect is often so overpowering that it carries the listener along to the heights of religious fervor. It is a contemporary type of sacred service which combines unusual electronic sounds with haunting themes of traditional Hebrew music.

Some of the highlights of the service include a very exciting “Shma — Hear O Israel,” which is sung in English in a virile rhythmic pattern of great strength and intensity. There is an excellent setting of the “Mi Chomocho” which contains a fine solo for the cantor. The “Kiddush” is very joyous and rhythmic, entirely different from what we are normally accustomed to hearing. But as the composer stated, “The Kiddush is a joyous moment in the service, and why should it not be reflected so in the music?” The “Bayom Hahu” is almost hypnotic as we listen to the melodic line sung antiphonally between the cantor and choir at what appears like lightning speed. The middle section calls for improvisation by the instruments, which reach a furious peak of excitement. Generally speaking, the accompaniment throughout is more involved rhythmically and harmonically than the vocal lines.

Worthy of particular note is the lovely “May the Words.” This is a setting of unusual beauty whose sustained melody seems to float out over the subtle rhythmic accompaniment. While one might think he detects a trace of Hollywood-ism in it, it is nevertheless as beautiful and effective a setting as anyone would want to hear.

The words “my Rock and my Redeemer” are exquisitely expressive, and there is an unforgettable moment as the soprano sings a closing “Amen” high in the voice over the sustained choral ending.

The “Mourner’s Kaddish” is very impressive. Awesome and mysterious, it seems to capture the sanctity of the words. It is a simultaneous recital of the prayer by two voices, the Rabbi and the narrator, the former in Hebrew, the latter in English, juxtaposed over an accompaniment of mysterious sounds emanating from the electronic tape. The effect is startling and highly dramatic. And although the Hebrew text is known to everyone, the English translation serves to illumine more vividly the meaning of the Kaddish.

The final hymn, called “The World is Rolling On,” is a ballad-type setting for unison voices with choral accompaniment, in solid folk-rock beat, whose melody and text truly “say it like it is.” Its message has universal implications.

The fact of the matter is that this service has much to say, plus a novel way of saying it. Although written for the Reform liturgy, it can easily be adapted to the conservative synagogue. One may hesitate to present this work as an on-going Friday Eve service, but portions of it can certainly be incorporated into the traditional service, using organ accompaniment. For concert purposes it is infallible, because it will have much appeal to musicians, hazzanim, and especially audiences — young as well as old.

In reflecting upon Kingsley’s music, one is reminded of the remarks of Igor Stravinsky in his “Poetics of Music,” where he writes: “What is called the style of an epoch results from the combination of individual styles, a combination which is dominated by the methods of the composers who have exerted a preponderant influence on their time. We can notice, going back to the example of Mozart and Haydn, that they benefited from the same culture, drew on the same sources, and borrowed each other’s discoveries. Each of them, however, works a miracle all his own. One may say that the masters, who in all their greatness surpass the generality of their contemporaries, send out the rays of their genius will beyond their own day. In this day they appear as powerful signal fires — as beacons, to use Baudelaire’s expression — by whose light and warmth is developed a sum of tendencies that will be shared by most of their successors and that contributes to form the parcel of traditions that make up a culture.

## RESULTS OF A COMMISSIONING PROJECT:

"KOCHVE VOKER" — MORNING STARS

PINCHAS SPIRO

*"Kochve Voker" is an Sabbath Morning Service for Cantor and Three-Part Youth Choir by Max Wohlberg, Commissioned by Beth El Congregation of Akron, Ohio and published by Transcontinental Music Publications, New York.*

**The Musical Score:**

Those who believe that in order for a contemporary composition to be meaningful and satisfying, it must be predominantly atonal, vague, harsh and dissonant, will find in Max Wohlberg's first major choral work, "Kochve Voker", the following faults: there is a solid feeling of tonality throughout; the modulations are natural and smooth; it is delightfully melodious, and the variety of harmonic treatments are mostly traditional and extremely pleasing to the ear. Clearly, "Kochve Voker" is not a trail-blazer in terms of modern contemporary composition, as some understand it, but I doubt that it was intended as such.

From a different point of view, however, "Kochve Voker" is sure to stand out as an important original contribution to the music of the synagogue. It contains qualities that set it up in a class all by itself. It is indeed an ideal and a model for others to follow. To understand the full significance of Wohlberg's new work, we must first try to reconstruct and understand the circumstances that motivated its writing.

Hazzan Jerome Kopmar commissioned Wohlberg, his former instructor in Hazzanut at the Cantor's Institute, to write a Sabbath morning service for his Junior Choral Society. We can assume that the composer considered the challenges as well as the pitfalls that are inherent in writing a musical work for children's voices before accepting the commission. He must have come to grips with the all-important fundamental question: "Why another musical service?" Merely to add to the quantity of music available isn't the answer. We bear in mind that Wohlberg is primarily a practicing hazzan, a musicologist and a pedagogue. From the results, it is apparent that he regarded his commission as an educational opportunity of the highest order. It is a well-known fact that, by and large, Junior Choirs have not been successful in pleading effectively the case of their rightful place within the 'framework of the regular Hebrew School curriculum. In most of our congregational schools, they are

tolerated merely as a pleasant novelty. Most of the educators in charge have failed to realize the tremendous potential benefits that such a project can give its participants in terms of engaging in an enjoyable activity (in itself a rarity in Hebrew School); acquiring a worthwhile repertoire of prayers and sacred songs that will remain with the children long after all the other facts and figures which they have learned have been forgotten; and most important, creating strong emotional bonds between the children and their Jewish heritage. Wohlberg had this in mind when he planned his service. The task at hand was to write a service that would clearly demonstrate the potential educational values of youth choirs. He came up with an original and brilliant idea. He conceived his service as a condensed course in Jewish music. He constructed it in such a manner, that, upon learning it, every member of the choir will possess a fundamental understanding of the elements that make for authentic Jewish music. In the hands of a less articulate composer, such an ambitious undertaking might have been a trite, pragmatic conglomeration of unrelated elements. In Wohlberg's sure hand, the work turned out to be a gem of immaculate good taste — a beautiful mosaic where all the contrasting elements hold together as a homogeneous whole. "Kochve Voker" is the dream-come-true of any youth choir director who has ever searched in vain for a suitable work.

The theme with which Wohlberg starts and ends the service is pentatonic. It is the nucleus of the entire work, appearing in one form or another. Musicologists are in agreement that the pentatonic mode is the oldest and most authentic of all the surviving Jewish modes. References to this mode are found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Plutarch, and the weekday *Avot* is based on it. In a sense, it is the basis of much of the other authentic remnants of our musical heritage, including the cantillations of the Bible. This is the core of Wohlberg's service, and is there a better way to introduce children to the roots of their musical heritage? In Wohlberg's masterful and inspired hand, this ancient theme, harmonized in open fourths and fifths comes to life, sounding majestically ancient and at the same time vigorously fresh and up to date.

The second element around which the service revolves is the modern Israeli idiom. On the one hand the most ancient and on the other the most new and virile, and yet how wonderfully compatible they are! One hardly feels the transition from one to another. Wohlberg has observed that the miraculous rebirth of the State of Israel must have a strong impact on contemporary composers and must be reflected in their works. In "Kochve Voker", Wohlberg proves that



he practices what he preaches. His intentions are clearly indicated by his use of the Israeli theme on such phrases as *Ki Mitziyon Tetze Torah* and on *Hashivenu* — “Return us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old.”

In addition to the pentatonic scale and Israeli musical themes which cement the entire work, there are many other important Jewish music elements in the service. The cantillations are presented in a capsule form of the Torah reading. First, we hear the traditional melody of the Torah blessing in the text of *Baruch Shenatan Torah*. Next, we have the Torah cantillations for the text of *Uv’nucho Yomar*. Finally, we have the Haftarah cantillations in *Ki Lekach Tov*. The pentatonic theme which rounds up the cantillation section clearly demonstrates their common source.

The old-fashioned synagogue style of composition is represented only in parts of the *musaf k’dushah*. It is a refined distillation of the old-time nusach that retains its warmth and nostalgic feeling. The pentatonic theme manages to assert its presence here, too. Particularly worthy of mention is the delightful tune of *Hu Elohenu*. It is sure to capture the hearts of the young singers and the adult listeners alike.

The hassidic idiom, a vital part of our musical legacy, comes to life in the vibrant syncopated rhythms of *Yism’chu*. The Sephardic tradition is represented in the noble and graceful lines of *En Kelohenu*. (Anyone who has ever considered replacing the customary “traditional” Germanic tune should try this one!)

Although the service was written specifically for children’s voices, (talented children, we may add), it is not a children’s service in the limiting sense of that category. The composer did not compromise his music for the sake of simplifications. The interpretation of the text is fully adult, and there are many complex and sophisticated forms and ideas to satisfy and indeed delight the most enlightened adults. A considerable part of the service is assigned to the cantor-soloist. It is elaborate but it does not cater to vocal virtuosity for its own sake. In fact, its range makes it accessible to both tenors and baritones. Two of Wollberg’s most outstanding virtues as a composer are his ability to spin lovely melodies, and his knowledge of modulation. In “*Kochve Voker*” he makes excellent use of both. In the choral parts, the *cantus firmus* is assigned mostly to the upper voice, but there is ample interest and melody in the other two voices as well. This is as it should be, since youth choirs learn their parts mostly by rote. The harmonic treatments are almost exclusively of the polyphonic or horizontal variety. Only in a few

instances does the choir sing in vertical blocks. Texts such as V'kara Zeh El Zeh and M'shar'tav Sho'alim Zeh Lazeh are interpreted graphically by a series of echo-like imitations. In Hodo Al Eretz, we are treated to a short, beautiful three-part fugue. My favorite selection is Torat Adonai T'mimah, an incidental selection (or composition) which was added to the service for concert purposes to suggest the Torah reading. It is a gentle and inspiring piece of music in antiphonal form.

**The Recording:**

*(The Beth El Junior Choral Society of Akron, Ohio; Hazzan Jerome B. Kopmar, Director; Hazzan Robert Zalkin, Soloist; Beth El Records, CRC 2131)*

The Beth El Junior Choral Society recorded Wohlberg's "Kochve Voker" shortly before its premiere public performance in April of 1968. The work as interpreted by Hazzan Kopmar is a thing of sheer beauty. There seems to be a strong affinity between the musical work and the Choral Society that commissioned and recorded it. It has to do with the unique singing style of this unusual choral group and with the personal musical style of the composer. Both extol the virtues of the small but controlled sound and place the main emphasis on quality rather than on volume.

The Beth El Junior Choral Society constitutes a most unusual phenomenon. Choral groups of this caliber are usually developed in large schools with thousands of potential candidates to draw from and with ample time and resources to sustain them. When we consider the fact that the Beth El Junior Choral Society was developed in a small congregation in a small Jewish community, its outstanding accomplishments are rather astounding. All the credit for the achievements of the Choral Society is due to its director, Hazzan Jerome B. Kopmar, who founded and developed it. While in most other children's choirs there seems to be a constant shouting contest, the consistent sound of Hazzan Kopmar's Choral Society (even with over 70 members) is surprisingly small. This, to a large extent, is Hazzan Kopmar's secret ingredient for success. With modern amplification techniques, there is really no need for wasting effort on producing a big sound. The energy can beneficially be diverted to the production of a sweet, pure and controlled tone, on musical discipline, on precise attacks and conclusions, accurate phrasing, and on proper shading and blending. The sound engineer can take care of the rest.

"Kochve Voker" is the third commercial recording by the Beth

El Junior Choral Society in three years. It is by far the best. With each new recording, the group seems to make giant strides and demonstrates greater ability, assurance and virtuosity. The first recording ("Shirat Atidenu" by Yolkoff), was somewhat hesitant, but it gave an indication of things to come. The second recording, ("A Singing of Angels" by Davidson), was much more confident and polished, but it lacked in diction clarity. Much of Samuel Rosenbaum's fine lyrics are barely intelligible. Now, with the first-rate recording of Wohlberg's "Kochve Voker", the Choral Society acquires a stature that is almost professional in caliber. We should mention the few minor flaws that the recording contains. There are a few mispronounced words, and we question some of the phrasings. The soloist, Hazzan Robert Zalkin is endowed with a beautiful baritone of heroic proportions. This last quality is precisely why we feel that it does not blend well with the children's sweeter and delicate sound, or with Wohlberg's lacy and refined lines.

### **Summing Up**

Hazzan Max Wohlberg has written a service which will enrich immeasurably the repertoire of Junior and Youth Choirs. Hazzan Jerome B. Kopmar with his Junior Choral Society have demonstrated with their recording of this service what an exquisite work it is. The educational opportunities which are clearly evident in this work should help to establish an important place for youth choirs in the programs of many of our congregational schools. We certainly hope that educators will take note.

## MUSIC SECTION

The following two compositions are among the first publications of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's — Jewish Music Research Center published in 1964. The compositions are taken from the Musical Repertoire of the 18th Century Amsterdam Jewish Portuguese Community. The compositions are interesting in their individual approach to the solo voice and to the harmonic writing for three voices.

האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים - מרכז לחקר המוסיקה היהודית  
 THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM — JEWISH MUSIC RESEARCH CENTRE  
 UNIVERSITE HEBRAIQUE DE JERUSALEM — CENTRE D'ETUDE DE MUSIQUE JUIVE

מן הרפרטואר המוסיקלי  
 של

**הקהלה הפורטוגזית באמשטרדם**

במאה הי"ח

From the Musical Repertoire of the 18th Century Amsterdam Jewish Portuguese Community  
 Du Repertoire Musical de la Communauté Juive Portugaise d'Amsterdam au 18<sup>e</sup> Siècle

תשכ"ד - 1964

ירושלים, בשיתוף עם בית הספרים הלאומי והאוניברסיטאי  
 Jerusalem, in collaboration with the Jewish National and University Library

# כל הנשמה

[לפניה נחשו, לשמחת חורף ולפניה נדחשית]

Adagio from an anonymous cantata for solo voice, from the repertoire of the Jewish Portuguese community of Amsterdam (XVIIIth c.)

Edited from a manuscript in the library "Ets Haim" (Amsterdam), with accompaniment by Israel Adler

פרק סלנסטה אנונימית לקול יחיד, סמור הדפוסאר על הקהלה הפורטוגלית באמסטרדם (המאה הי"ח)

הנושא לאור על-פי סמור-יד בספרית "עץ חיים" (אמסטרדם), בתוספת לווין, ישראל אדלר

Adagio solo

The musical score is written for a solo voice and piano accompaniment. It begins with the tempo marking 'Adagio solo'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The score includes several measures with fingerings (5 and 10) and a trill (tr) indicated above the notes. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in both hands.

Kol ha - re-sha - mah kol ha - ne-sha - mah te -

- ha - lel yah.

ha - le - lu - yah ha - le - lu - yah

First system of musical notation. The vocal line (treble clef) begins with a trill (tr) over a note. The piano accompaniment (grand staff) provides harmonic support.

Second system of musical notation. The vocal line includes the lyrics "le-lu-yah" and a measure number "15" in a box. The piano accompaniment continues.

Third system of musical notation. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Ha-le-lu-" and a trill (tr) over a note. The piano accompaniment continues.

Fourth system of musical notation. The vocal line includes the lyrics "yah kol ha-ne-sha-mah te-ha-lel yah kol ha-ne-sha-mah te-ha-lel" and a measure number "20" in a box. The piano accompaniment continues.

25

yah ha-le-lu-yah

tr

This system contains measures 25, 26, and 27. The vocal line starts with a whole note 'yah' and a half note 'ha-le-lu-yah'. Measure 27 features a trill on the final 'yah'. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

le-lu-yah

tr

This system contains measures 28, 29, and 30. The vocal line continues with a half note 'le-lu-yah' and a trill on the final 'yah'. The piano accompaniment features a more active treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns, while the bass line remains steady.

30

kol hamesha-mah kol hamesha-ma te-ha

This system contains measures 31, 32, and 33. The vocal line has a half note 'kol hamesha-mah' and a half note 'kol hamesha-ma te-ha'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

tr

This system contains measures 34, 35, and 36. The vocal line features a trill on the final note. The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

35

Musical score for measures 35-38. The top staff is a single melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats. Measure 35 is marked with a box containing the number 35. The music features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines.

le - lu - yah Ha - le - lu - yah

Fine

Musical score for measures 39-42. The top staff is a single melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats. The lyrics "le - lu - yah Ha - le - lu - yah" are written below the notes. The word "Fine" is written at the end of the piece. The music features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, and a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Trills (tr) are indicated above the notes in measures 39 and 41.



# חשקי חזקי

Text: Isaac Aboab da Fonseca (1605-1693)  
 Music: Abraham Casseres (XVIIIth c.)

Edited, from a manuscript in the library  
 "Ets Haim" (Amsterdam), with realization  
 of the Basse, by Israel Adler

הסליסטר: יצחק אבווב דה פונסעקא  
 המוסיקה: אברהם קסרס (אמסטרדם)

הרביא לאור, עלמי כתוב-ידו בספרים  
 "עץ חיים" (אמסטרדם), עם עזרו הכס,  
 ישראל אדלר

"A tre voce con stroment ad libitum"

**Largo** 5

Soprano: Hish-ki hiz-ki mi-de yom yom ma-her na  
 Alto: U-ri u-ri ne-vel 'a-sor be-kol zim  
 Bass: Hish-ki hiz-ki mi-de yom yom ma-her na  
 Continuo: U-ri u-ri ne-vel 'a-sor be-kol zim

10

Soprano: -er mal-ki hosh-ki rim-shi shum-shi od lo yikh-rah shi-rim shi-ri yar-hekh zar-hekh lo ya-vo  
 Alto: -er mal-ki hosh-ki rim-shi shum-shi od lo yikh-rah shi-rim shi-ri yar-hekh zar-hekh lo ya-vo  
 Bass: -er mal-ki hosh-ki rim-shi shum-shi od lo yikh-rah shi-rim shi-ri yar-hekh zar-hekh lo ya-vo  
 Continuo: -er mal-ki hosh-ki rim-shi shum-shi od lo yikh-rah shi-rim shi-ri yar-hekh zar-hekh lo ya-vo

15

- be ma - her ha - er mal - ki hosh - ki ma - her ha - er mal -  
 'od be - kol zim - rah shi - rim shi - ri be - kol zim - rah shi -

- be ma - her ha - er mal - ki hosh - ki ma - her ha - er mal -  
 'od be - kol zim - rah shi - rim shi - ri be - kol zim - rah shi -

- be ma - her ma - her ha - er mal -  
 'od be - kol be - kol zim - rah shi -

20 25

- ki hosh - ki rim - shi shum - shi od lo yikh - be ya - ir li or ya -  
 - rim shi - ri yar - hekh zar - hekh lo ya - vo 'od ki va o - rekh ki

- ki hosh - ki rim - shi shum - shi od lo yikh - be ya - ir li or ya -  
 - rim shi - ri yar - hekh zar - hekh lo ya - vo 'od ki va o - rekh ki

- ki hosh - ki rim - shi shum - shi od lo yikh - be ya - ir li or ya -  
 - rim shi - ri yar - hekh zar - hekh lo ya - vo 'od ki va o - rekh ki

30

- ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya - ir li or ya ir li  
 va o rekh ku mi o ri ki va o rekh ki va o

- ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya - ir li or ya ir li  
 va o rekh ku mi o ri ki va o rekh ki va o

- ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya - ir ya - ir li or ya  
 va o rekh ku mi o ri ki va ki va o rekh ki

35 40

or ya ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya ir li or  
 rekh ki va o rekh ku mi o ri ki va o rekh

or ya ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya  
 rekh ki va o rekh ku mi o ri ki

ir li or shim shekh mal-ki ya ir li  
 va o rekh ku mi o ri ki va o

45

ya-ir li or shm shekh mal ki  
ki va o rekh ku mi o ri

ir li or ya-ir li or shm shekh mal ki  
va o rekh ki va o rekh ku mi o ri

or shm shekh ya-ir li or shm shekh mal ki  
rekh o rekh ki va o rekh ku mi o ri

Fine

חסד חזק

ספר לכתוב חנוכה בית הכנסת הפרוטסטנטי  
אשכנזים 1675

1

שובו סובו השולחים  
אל אור קצר גורי גורי  
עלמי עלצו לפנה קפה  
כי בא ישפט לא פגורו

2

עורי עורי נכל עשור  
בגול זמנה שירום שירי  
ירחן זרחם לא נבא עוד  
כי בא אורר חסמי אורי

3

חשבו חזקו סדר יום יום  
סדר באר מלכי חשבו  
רשמי חשבו עוד לא יכנה  
נאור לי אור חשבו מלכי

4

קמה קמה לבי אבי  
ישכור קבוד בחור עירי  
שברי שברי חוקה חשבו  
יעור זמר עירי צורי

The sound quality of the record is good and gives one an intimate feeling, as if these Yiddish poems were being recited or sung to each listener. The intimacy and strength of the musical settings may be a factor.

As to the performance, singer and pianist have worked together to blend a musicality rare to be found in the musical world. Bianca Sauler is a true artist, possessing a beautiful voice. She spins her tones with elegance, and handles the passages with unerring skill and ease. Each song tells its particular story. Lazar Weiner is perhaps one of the finest pianists and his accompaniment truly does justice to his own music.

As for interpretation, there is not much to say, since the composer himself was the coach for the singer. **The** performance is imaginative, alive, intimate, gentle, dramatic, and most artistic.

I have purposely left out any remarks about Lazar Weiner and his music, since the jacket of the record contains a beautiful and deserving tribute to the composer and his contribution to the Yiddish art song by Albert Weisser. "By far the most significant composer that the Yiddish milieu in America has so far produced is Lazar Weiner." He must be reckoned among *our* finest contemporary art-song writers. Fortunately for Jews his settings are of Yiddish poetry and his sensitivity to the sound and structure of Yiddish is unmatched among all modern composers.

This recording should be included in the music library of every music lover and art song collector.

**MORTON KULA**

## RECORD REVIEW

LAZAR WEINER SONGS, Bianca Sauler, soprano. *Composer at the piano. Naomi 1000.*

This recording of Yiddish songs by Lazar Weiner is excellent. Listening to this collection of seventeen songs as performed by soprano Bianca Sauler with the composer at the piano is a delight from beginning to end.

As a native of the city of Warsaw, where Cantor Sirota served as “Obercantor” at the great “Tlomacka Synagogue” and was described by the Yiddish press as: “The King of Hazzanim” . . . , I am very curious to know when and how did the great Sirota study with Cantor Ersler.

It should be noted that Sirota came to Warsaw at the very early years of the century — before World War I. He came already as a great Hazzan, having served as Shtot Chazan in the great “Shtot Shuhl” in Vilna, for a number of years prior to his coming to Warsaw. So, it is quite certain that Sirota, even when accepted in Vilna, was already a great Hazzan. That must have been at the latter end of the 19th century.

Does Joseph Levine mean to suggest that Sirota travelled from Vilna or Warsaw (such large cities) to Cantor Ersler in Wloclawek (a small town) to study hazzanut? — — — It does not sound likely!

I shall be most thankful to the gentleman to clarify the matter, so as not to distort historic facts which may be used by a future historian who will write about the history of hazzanim and hazzanut.

Writing these lines I am, with anticipation of your kind reply.

**ABRAHAM N. OLER.** *Rabbr*  
Temple Beth Tefilah  
East Hartford, Conn.

## FROM OUR READERS

Dear Sir:

In the Elul 5729 issue of your journal, on page 20, there appeared a fine article about Cantor Abba Yosef Weisgal, by Joseph Levine. He states on the same page that Cantor Gershon Sirota was a pupil of Cantor Ersler of Wloclawelc.

Sirota, born in 1874, assumed his first pulpit in Odessa at the age of 21, in 1895. In 1901, when he moved to the Shlot-Shul in Vilna, he was 27; not at all too old to continue his studies with a master like Ersler, who had been a pupil of Weintraub in Koenigsberg. Once having been indoctrinated in the noble style of Kashtan, the young Sirota was drawn to anyone who promised to further his development in that direction.

As to whether this conjectural regimen of study was feasible across the 200 miles from Vilna to Wloclawek, Rabbi Oler has a stronger argument. Had Weisgal asserted that Sirota studied with Ersler during his Warsaw years, beginning in 1909, the geographical problem would have been nil, as Wloclawek is practically a suburb of the Polish capitol. By then, however, Sirota enjoyed the collaboration and musical guidance of his contemporary, Leo Low as Choirmaster at the Tlomacki Synagogue and he would not have felt the need to study with Ersler!

So we are back where we began.

At this point I contacted Abba Weisgal, my original source, who reiterated that when he came to Wloclawek in 1904, his immediate predecessor as Ersler's pupil had been Sirota. In Masoretic matters where the veracity of a recorder or the accuracy of a scribe is under scrutiny, we latter-day critics are at a disadvantage. For Weisgal, like Rashi's handmaiden at the Red Sea, saw that which even the Prophets did not see. If he says Sirota studied with Ersler from 1901-1903. TEIKU!

### Hazzan Levine replies:

Rabbi Oler raises a valid doubt as to whether or not Gershon Sirota could have, or would have studied with Alexander Ersler in the years immediately following the turn of this century.

Sirota was heir to the dignified virtuoso style originated by Kashtan a century before. He sang the same type of heroic recitatives, which featured distinctly structured and wide-ranging cadenzi and which required phenomenal vocal resources. The tradition had been put on a firm theoretical basis by Kashtan's son, Hirsch Weintraub who, in the words of Dr. Hyman Harris, "... dared to harmonize the Hebrew prayer song in its original traditional character, which Sulzer had condemned as 'Asiatic'. The East European Synagogue music centered chiefly in Odessa, where, the disciples of Kashtan established their academy."

**JOSEPH A. LEVINE, Hazzan**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
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